

# The Policing of Sex Work in London, Ontario, Instruments of Surveillance and Moments of Resistance

## **Slide 2: "There's a difference between *being* safe and feeling safe"**

A presentation of findings from a community based participatory needs assessment with street-level sex workers

## **Slide 3: Status of Sex Work in Canada**

- Street-level sex work (SLSW) has been defined as the exchange of sexual services for resources related to basic survival, which may include money, shelter, illicit drugs or other commodities
- Within Canada, where selling sex is **legal**, it remains quasi-criminalized by virtue of the fact that associated activities are **illegal**:
  - communicating in public with clients, the purchase of sexual services by others,
  - profiting or benefiting materially from income obtained from others' sexual services
  - Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Acts, s.286.2, 2014

## **Slide 4: SafeSpace circa 2009**

- A few women had a vision
- Lived and worked in a neighborhood where there was shaming of sex workers (cameras being installed, legislation being challenged in court system)
- Wanted a space for women where they would not be judged
- Confidential
- No Violence or Exploitation

## **Slide 5: Safe Space**

## **Slide 6: But SafeSpace is so much more ...**

- Women accessing the space
- Volunteers
- Students
- Allies
- Key Allies (i.e. ANOVA, MLHU)

## **Slide 7: Research Objective**

To identify the health and safety needs of street-based sex workers in London, Ontario, as described by workers themselves.

**Slide 8: Guiding research question**

“What would assist you to live and work with enhanced safety and dignity in our community?”

**Slide 9:**

CHARACTERISTIC	MEAN (RANGE) (N=24)
AGE	41 years (24 – 57 years)
LENGTH OF TIME AS A SEX WORKER	9 years (Less than one month – 30 years or more)
	Percentage Response
SELF-IDENTIFIED AS BELONGING TO A RACIALIZED GROUP	33%  71% of women who identified as a minority, identified as Aboriginal
HOUSING: APARTMENT HOUSE HOMELESS UNKNOWN	67% 9% 9% 14%
PAST OR PRESENT SUBSTANCE ABUSE: YES NO UNKNOWN	71% 19% 9%
SELF-REPORTED HEALTH ISSUES: YES NO UNKNOWN	67% yes 23% no 10% unknown/unanswered

**Slide 10: Relationships**

**Slide 11: Women who access SafeSpace identified their needs for safety and dignity as shaped by their relationships**

- *Relationships to public space*
- *Relationships with community services*
- Relationships to SafeSpace
- Relationships to themselves and others

- Need for comfort, recognition, inclusion, meaningful opportunities, and services free of judgment and shame.
- 

### **Slide 12: Relationship to Public Space(s)**

Public spaces are subject to surveillance and publically policed:

- Formalized – systemic, regulated forms of policing
- Informal – citizen / informal policing
- Up surge of discussions in putting up cameras
- Harder stances, loitering, “for patrons only”
- So much policing, social policing

### **Slide 13: Quote**

“I try to go and work on the street and it’s the cops that wreck our ability to be able to work properly. We have to stand out there a little extra longer because they feel like harassing us.”

### **Slide 14: Quote**

“This place [London], I think it kind of forces people into that profession because honestly like trying to busk – going around trying to busk or anything like that, like I get a lot of criticism for that and I’m like okay. So great. So am I just supposed to go put a dick in my mouth for money, what am I supposed to do since I’m over 25 years old and, you know, in a jam somewhere where I don’t know anything and know anyone. That’s great. It’s like I’ll go do that then instead of play my guitar. *Excuse me.*”

### **Slide 15: Quote**

“A lot of the girls get a lot of criticism from like public places, restaurants, whatever and it doesn’t even matter. It seems so many people get hated on. Like even they go in to purchase something ... They’re riding them when they’re in the bathroom. It’s so rude that they can’t even put their makeup on, nothing.”

### **Slide 16: Quote**

“...there is nothing worse than being on the street and you have a meltdown and right away the cops on you thinking you know you are out of control.”

### **Slide 17: Relationship with Community Services**

- Performing roles to access services
- Needing to know the systems to access the systems
- Being a ‘statistic’ to fit an agency’s agenda

- Performing roles to access, telling the right kind of story to meet policy criteria
- Being a statistic
- A victim to get access, and the right kind of victim
- The frustration of needing to be an expert negotiator

#### **Slide 18: Quote**

“Like a lot of the community resources, it keeps you on the same level. It doesn’t – it’s not actually to better you. It’s just to kind of sustain a lifestyle that’s not a healthy lifestyle at all.”

“I avoided most of them [community services] because between addiction and sex work and for the most part, being on street level, people are not pleasant so – unless I put on my articulate voice and – and sober enough to use it.”

#### **Slide 21: Sex workers and allies lash out at new London Police policy to name sex buyers.**

#### **Slide 22: Help Make Sex Work Safer in London: Calling for the LPS to Reverse their Policy Direction**

#### **Slide 23: London Police Name First Alleged ‘Johns’ Under New Policy**

As part of their effort to combat human trafficking, London police have posted the names of four people accused of soliciting sex. This is the first time police have released the names of alleged ‘johns’ under the new initiative, although they are usually part of the public record accessible at the London courthouse. The men range in age from 18 to 70 years old, three are from London and one is from Toronto.

Police posted the names of the men in a news release on their website, sharing that link on their Facebook and Twitter accounts, although they did not repeat the names in the social media posts. The ‘john sting’ was reportedly conducted Wednesday night at a London hotel, during which the men are alleged to have made contact with an undercover officer to purchase sex. Each of the four men was charged with communication for the purpose of obtaining sexual services.

#### **Slide 24: St. Thomas Police**

- St. Thomas police turn to citizens to ask: Should we name sex buyers too?
- St. Thomas police chief says no to naming johns

## **Slide 25: Visibility**

We are visible in the media and in our joint projects with Maggie's Sex Work Action Project, Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Work Advocacy Network, and most recently the Canadian HIV AIDS Legal Network in their report *The Perils of Protection*, which was a research about the experiences of sex workers in Ontario with law enforcement. We are also in regular contact with the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, where we participate within information sharing and capacity building workshops on messaging and law reform advocacy at municipal, provincial, and national levels. Our use of social media allows us to connect with groups regionally and internationally.